

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 HA-05 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /094 W
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R 210646Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7502
INFO AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 1231

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PROP, PINT, SF
SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION ABOLISHED

REF: CAPE TOWN 892,

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING ANOTHER DAMAGING REPORT ON THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION SCANDALS, PRIME MINISTER VORSTER HAS ABOLISHED THE DEPARTMENT, RETIRED ESCHER RHOODIE, AND ANNOUNCED THE CREATION OF A NEW AGENCY. CONNIE MULDER IS EXPECTED TO LOSE HIS INFORMATION PORTFOLIO AND TO SUFFER POLITICALLY AS A RESULT. END SUMMARY.

2. ON JUNE 12, THE PARLIAMENTARY SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS TABLED ITS THIRD AND FINAL REPORT ON ITS INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION. THE REPORT CONFIRMED THE COMMITTEE'S PREVIOUS FINDINGS AND SAID IT WAS "DEEPLY PERTURBED" AT THE MANNER IN WHICH SECRETARY OF INFORMATION ESCHER RHOODIE IGNORED THE CONTROLLING RULES AND REGULATIONS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS DUTIES. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED THAT "IF THE SECRETARY'S
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PROFESSIONAL DUTIES MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM PROPERLY TO DISCHARGE THE ACCOUNTING RESPONSIBILITIES OF HIS DEPARTMENT, CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO RELIEVING HIM OF HIS ACCOUNTING FUNCTION." THE REPORT NOTED THAT "OTHER INSTRUCTIONS WERE DISREGARDED BY CERTAIN SENIOR OFFICIALS" AND ATTACKED THE "CLOAK OF MYSTERY" COVERING THE SECRET OPERATIONS SIDE OF INFORMATION'S ACTIVITIES.

2. ON JUNE 15, PRIME MINISTER VORSTER TOLD PARLIAMENT THAT THE CABINET HAD DECIDED TO ABOLISH THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND REPLACE IT WITH A NEW AGENCY NAMED THE BUREAU OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS (BNIC) WHICH WILL INHERIT ALL FORMER DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION ACTIVITIES EXCEPT FOR ITS SECRET OPERATIONS. VORSTER SAID THAT THE POST OF SECRETARY FOR INFORMATION WOULD ALSO BE ABOLISHED AND IN ITS PLACE THE POSITION OF DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS, ON THE LEVEL JUST LOWER THAN THAT OF A DEPARTMENT HEAD, WOULD BE CREATED. SINCE RHOODIE'S POSITION NO LONGER EXISTED, VORSTER SAID ESCHER RHOODIE WILL RETIRE ON JULY 1. VORSTER NOTED THAT THE BNIC WILL "INITIALLY" BE HEADED BY CONNIE MULDER AND ANNOUNCED THAT RETIRING BUREAU FOR STATE SECURITY HEAD GENERAL VAN DEN BERGH HAS BEEN ASKED TO EVALUATE "THE CONFIDENTIAL PROJECTS SO THAT IT CAN BE DECIDED WHICH OF THE PROJECTS MUST BE CONTINUED AND TO WHICH DEPARTMENTS SUCH PROJECTS MUST BE CHANNELLED."

3. FOLLOWING THE THIRD PARLIAMENTARY REPORT AND VORSTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION WOULD BE ABOLISHED, A PROGRESSIVE FEDERAL PARTY (PFP) SPOKESMAN, HARRY SCHWARZ, STATED IN PARLIAMENT THAT THE PFP WOULD DEMAND MULDER'S RESIGNATION IF HE DID NOT GIVE UP HIS BNIC PORTFOLIO. DURING THE JUNE 16 INFORMATION DEBATE, CONNIE MULDER REQUESTED THAT VORSTER RELIEVE HIM OF ONE OF MULDER'S TWO PORTFOLIOS, CONFIDENTIAL

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EITHER INFORMATION OR THE DEPARTMENT OF PLURAL RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT. MULDER ALSO WELCOMED VAN DEN BERGH'S INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION'S SECRET OPERATIONS.

4. LEAD STORY IN JUNE 18 SUNDAY TIMES BY FLEUR DE VILLIERS, ENTITLED "MULDER LOSES HIS POWER BATTLE", REPORTED THAT PRO-MULDER FACTION WITHIN NATIONAL PARTY, ANTICIPATING A STORM OVER THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORT, PREPARED A STATEMENT FOR POSSIBLE RELEASE BY THE PRIME MINISTER WHICH WOULD HAVE ANNOUNCED THE RETENTION OF MULDER AS INFORMATION MINISTER AND THE TRANSFER OF ESCHER RHOODIE FROM INFORMATION TO THE BUREAU FOR STATE SECURITY. ACCORDING TO DE VILLIERS, MULDER FOUGHT HARD TO RETAIN HIS INFORMATION PORTFOLIO AT A JUNE 13 CABINET MEETING BUT WAS DEFEATED.

5. OTHER NEWSPAPERS, BOTH ENGLISH AND AFRIKAANS, CARRY SPECULATION THAT MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PIK BOTHA WILL BE HANDED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BNIC AND WILL PROBABLY CLASH WITH ENTRENCHED PRO-MULDER ELEMENTS FROM THE FORMER DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION. ANOTHER RUMOR IS THAT F.W. DE KLERK, MINISTER OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAY BE GIVEN THE INFORMATION PORTFOLIO. BOTH ENGLISH AND AFRIKAANS

NEWSPAPERS HAVE ALSO CRITICIZED THE LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR AND CONTROL OVER THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION'S "ABOVE-BOARD" FUNCTIONS AND QUERY THE EXTENT OF SUCH IRREGULARITIES IN INFORMATION'S OTHER OPERATIONS WHICH ARE "SHROUDED IN A MIST OF SECRECY."

6. COMMENT: MULDER'S EXPECTED LOSS OF THE INFORMATION PORTFOLIO WILL DEPRIVE HIM OF ANY DIRECT ROLE AND VOICE IN THE IMPORTANT SECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. THE PRIME MINISTER'S DECISION WILL ALSO BADLY WOUNDED MULDER'S PRESTIGE AS IT WILL IMPLY FAILURE. IN RETROSPECT, VORSTER'S DECISION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR TO ALLOW MULDER TO RETAIN THE INFORMATION PORTFOLIO MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO LET MULDER SHOULDER THE BURDEN DURING THE EXPECTED EXPOSE OF WRONGDOING IN THE DEPARTMENT. MANY OBSERVERS, INCLUDING SOME OF THE NATIONALIST CONFIDENTIAL

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MPS, BELIEVE MULDER'S PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE LEADERSHIP HAVE NOW BEEN IRRETRIVABLY SET BACK.
EDMONDSON

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TAGS: PROP, PINT, SOPN, SF, (RHOODIE, ESCHEL)
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Type: TE
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